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## Soldiers, AUP remember fallen Afghan brethren

Written by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Matson, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs Office

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*Editor's Note: Staff Sgt. Ryan Matson, a Tennessee native and a police officer outside of the military, is the author of this article. He is a member of the 210th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment based out of North Carolina, but was attached to Task Force Red Bulls early in the deployment and supported Task Force Ironman. A Red Bull by chance.*

LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan - I am a military journalist, on my second deployment to the Middle East: one to Iraq, this one to Afghanistan.

When I go on missions, I usually try to stay in the background. That is because I'm an extra. I'm the camera guy. Unless I've trained with the unit and have a role in the mission beyond taking pictures and writing their story, I don't want the Soldiers preoccupied with me or doing things differently, it's not safe for them.

But Feb. 25 was one of the rare times I've broken my rule and did something more than just take pictures and ask questions. I went to the Alingar District Center, basically an Afghan police station and became involved -- I gave a grieving father pictures of his son. The father is, and the son was, an Afghan Uniform Police officer.



LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Lt. Mohammed Hussain, left, an Afghan Uniform Police platoon leader with the Alingar District Center, looks at pictures of his son, Farid Ahmad Malang, with other AUP officers and family members Feb. 25 at the Alingar DC, Alingar, Afghanistan. Jan. 25, Malang and three other AUP officers from the Alingar District Center were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near the village of Tigalam, completely destroying the up-armored humvee they had been patrolling in. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Matson, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs Office)

On Jan. 25, my friend AUP Lt. Mohammed Hussain, lost his son, Farid Ahmad Malang, and three other AUP officers, Abas Basram, Shafiq, and Kandahar Gul, when a massive 200-pound improvised explosive device detonated completely decimating their up-armored humvee. The officers were on a proactive patrol through their area of operations near the town of Tigalam.

"The officers who died in the IED bomb were the best officers in the Alingar District Center serving and protecting their people," Hussein told me. He was not crying, but his eyes were full of sorrow, and his voice was different than during previous talks I had with him. It was evident he was still fighting on a daily basis the emotional pain from losing his son.

"My son especially was a brave man. He was like my arm. All the time when we went on patrols, he was trying to protect me. He would never let me take out an IED we'd find, he was the only one who would. He was everything."

This incident hit home to me for a lot of reasons. First of all, in the United States, in Tennessee, I'm a police officer.

Secondly, I saw Hussein and Malang

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Security, I saw Hussain and Malang graduate the police academy, the first one held here on a provincial level, Nov. 4, 2010. I saw all four of the officers raise their certificates above their heads and proclaim, "I work for Afghanistan!" in front of the province's government and military officials. It reminded me of why I wanted to join the police force when I left active duty service in 2006. It was the first story I covered when I deployed to Afghanistan, and Hussain was the first person I interviewed. I was lucky to talk to him several times since then.

"The first time I saw you and the other Americans, I was glad," Hussain told me as we sat down to talk about his son and the other officers killed, "because I had found some new friends."

This year, I would be writing about what people are doing, rather than handling the situations myself as an officer. But seeing the Afghan officers graduate still made me feel a sense of camaraderie them, or at least a respect for the profession they had chosen to undertake.

There are a lot of differences between doing the job here in Afghanistan, and rolling around in a squad car back home, but in the end police work comes down to serving and protecting the public.

At home, quite often police work is about talking to people and solving problems. The method of solving a problem may be as simple as listening to a person talk, offering some advice or a number of a service to call, or it may mean carting someone to jail. You still get guns, drugs, chase people, all the stuff you wanted to do when you joined, but an average day for an officer-on-patrol comes down to talking to people and solving their wide array of problems. We usually don't have to worry, thankfully, about bombs blowing up our cruisers, or people shooting at us from mountainsides with automatic weapons or grenade launchers.

The insurgency has always reminded me of a bad street gang. The concepts are the same: they intimidate the people into not talking to authorities and doing what they want done. They terrorize innocent people. The same disdain I feel for people doing those deeds back home is the disdain these officers felt for their enemy here.

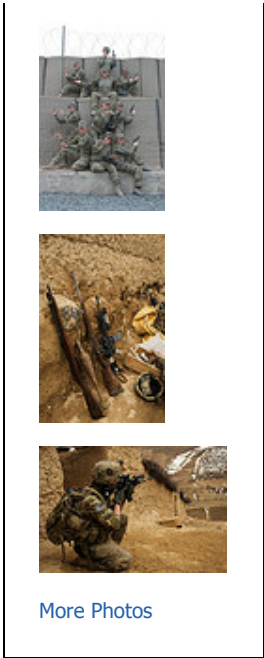
The incident also forced me to think of what would have happened had this happened in the United States. Without a doubt, not everybody loves the police back home. However, most people have some level of respect and support for those who try to maintain order and protect the safety of others.

When an officer is killed in the United States, officers come from near and far to their memorials. A convoy of police vehicles with flashing lights may last for miles. The world seems to stop for that moment. The streets are lined with civilians on the route too, and even though it is under tragic circumstances, I think officers can feel the appreciation the public has for what they do.

There will be no parade for the four officers killed here, but their service and dedication is still



LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Farid Ahmad Malang, left, a squad leader with the Afghan Uniform Police hands a bolt to U.S. Army Spc. Carlos Pulido, right, an all-wheeled mechanic with the 64th Military Police Company, 720th MP Battalion, from Turlock, Calif., Jan. 15 at the Alingar District Center, Alingar, Afghanistan. Ten days later, Malang and three other AUP officers from the Alingar District Center were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near the village of Tigalam, completely destroying the up-armored humvee they patrolled in. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Matson, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs Office)



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remembered by the Afghan and American officers who worked with them.

The 64th Military Police Company's 3rd Platoon, out of Fort Hood, Texas, worked and fought side-by-side with the four fallen officers, going on countless missions and patrols with them over the past year. They agreed with Hussain; the four officers killed were the best and brightest of the Alingar DC.

"They really were dedicated to the security of this place," said Sgt. Denver Missel, one of the team leaders in 3rd Plt. from Argyle, Minn. "(They were) hardworking, and they were cheery."

U.S. Army Sgt. Alberto Iglesias, another team leader with 3rd Plt. from South Plainfield, N.J., remembers Malang as being especially cheerful and enthusiastic – always the first one to run and greet his unit's Soldiers each time they visited.

"We called him Walika," Iglesias recalled. "It means 'come here,' but it became his name. As soon as we pulled in the gate he'd start yelling, 'Walika,' so that became his greeting.

"Two days before they died, I gave him one of my knives, because he would find IEDs, and dig them out himself. I told him if you're going to be doing that, at least use this, use something decent. He was always the first one to approach and the first to help, whether it was helping one of the mechanics we brought up to work on a vehicle – he was a squad leader and took care of their vehicles – or whatever we were doing."

"He was a great guy," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Joe Contreras, one of the platoon's squad leaders from San Antonio, Texas. "He was involved in everything."



LAGHMAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan - Abas Basram, right, an Afghan Uniform Police officer with the Alingar District Center on patrol in the village of Shakur, Afghanistan Jan. 15. Ten days later, Basram and three other AUP officers from the Alingar District Center were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated near the village of Tigalam, completely destroying the up-armored humvee they had been patrolling in. (Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Matson, Task Force Red Bulls Public Affairs Office)

"They were all also always ready to go out and fight, they were all very, very brave," said U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Friday, a team leader from Dover, Del.

Thirty days later, the photographs I gave Hussain of his son with his grandson still visibly shook the 17-year veteran officer. He was pleased to have pictures to remember him by, but he said thinking back on his son's memory will remain happy and still a bit painful all at once. Hussain had nine sons, and three of them followed his chosen profession as an officer. Malang, obviously, was one, and he has another son working at the DC. A third son works as an Afghan Civil Order of Police Officer in Kabul, and has expressed interest in coming to Alingar to work with his father as Malang had. Though he can never replace Malang, in the Afghan culture, when one's son or brother dies, it is often a call to service for another family member to continue their

legacy.

Meanwhile, Hussain still puts on his uniform and leads the other officers at the Alingar DC on patrols and training, just as he did for 17 years before his son was killed. And though he is grieving, he still presses on with the mission and motivates those around him.

"It's unforgettable for me," Hussain said. "My son was always trying to protect me. He would

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give some of his salary back to me. He loved working with the coalition forces and had a lot of friends in the MPs. I try to motivate the other AUP to work like my son and the other officers who were killed did in their honor.”

Somehow, when I sat down to write this, I couldn’t just do the typical news story – who, what, when, where. People read words, they read headlines, they get information or satisfy a curiosity, and then they forget. But these officers should not be forgotten. Both the Afghan Uniform Police officers and the American military police officers will tell you, they embodied the standard of what an officer here should be.

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